GUIDE TO CHOOSING A BERNESE MTN. DOG

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Swiss winner in the 1960's

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE BREED

The Bernese Mountain Dog is a large draft dog. Mature males are between 23–27½" at the shoulder and weigh between 75–110 pounds; females are slightly smaller (22–26") and weigh between 65–100 pounds. In size, Berners can be compared to Golden Retrievers or German Shepherds, which show a similar cross-section of sizes, although the Berner is much heavier set. This breed is not a giant breed as is the Saint Bernard or Newfoundland.

The tri-color markings are distinctive and striking. The coat is shiny black, of medium length, and slightly wavy. Characteristic markings include a white blaze, white chest (often in the shape of a Swiss cross), white feet and tail tip, as well as rust markings on the cheeks, between the white and black on the feet and legs, and eyebrow spots over each eye.

In character, the Bernese Mountain Dog reflects the purpose for which it was bred. Bernese have a long history in their Swiss homeland where they are

Drafting...delivering the morning milk, Switzerland

used as farm dogs, working *with* their master to drive and guard cattle and pull milk carts. They become strongly attached to their owners (often with a preference for one "master") and make fine, discriminating watchdogs if, as puppies, they are shown how to distinguish between what their owner considers normal versus unusual occurrences. A Berner who is a good watchdog and who is faced with an unusual occurrence will typically give warning barks and then seek out his owner as if to say, "Something strange is going on! You'd better come check!"

The Bernese is a typical shepherd's dog, and the breed has retained many characteristics which were important to the herdsman *(Senner)*. Fanciers of the breed will explain that these traits are exactly what make them so fond of the Bernese Mountain Dog, but they will readily admit that the Berner is not suited to every lifestyle.

As with all shepherd breeds, the Bernese is intelligent, responsive, quick to learn, and obedient if given training and companionship. As they are so devoted to their family, the adult may initially be wary of strangers and will tend to be more wary on its home territory. Berners do not usually do well if left alone all day

Drafting...carting for fun, California

on a regular basis—remember that they were bred from dogs originally "selected" because they preferred being with their masters constantly. As with all large dogs, the Berner should be obedience trained, and it is essential that the dog be trained by the owner. Most Bernese will not do well if sent off to a trainer and away from their masters. Berners usually take readily to obedience training because they are delighted to get their owner's full attention; however, training should be fun, and the dog must be aware that it is pleasing its master. Most Bernese tend to be "soft," which means that they learn best with repetition and praise instead of harsh corrections.

This gentleness of temperament is another typical feature of the breed. Berners are wonderful with children and small animals, seeming to be aware of their own size and careful when dealing with smaller creatures. As with all dogs, Berners should initially be introduced to toddlers as puppies and in happy circumstances. The Bernese is not quarrelsome with other dogs; the Berner

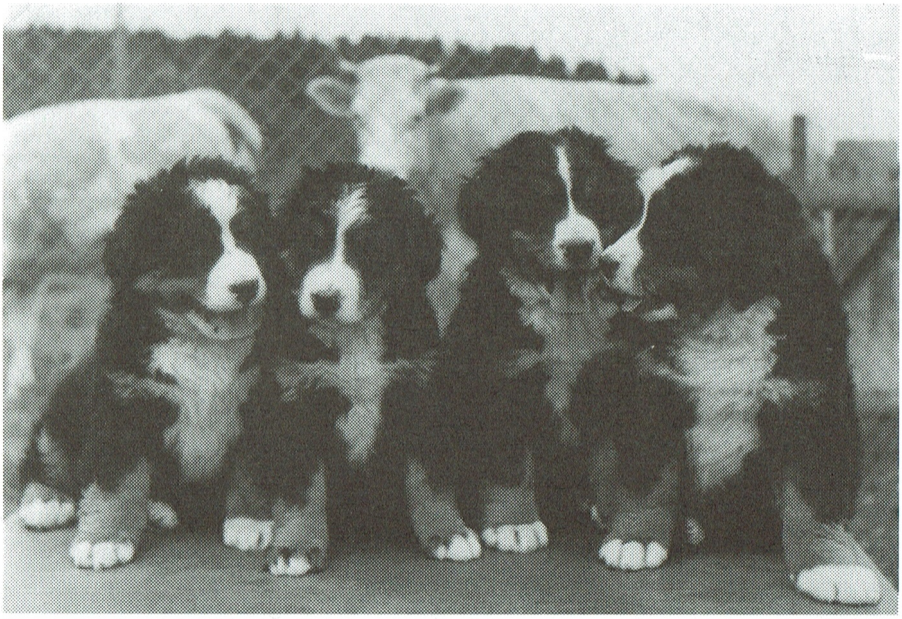
Gentleness of temperament...

prefers being with its human family to being with dogs and generally exhibits a "live and let live" attitude towards strange dogs.

All dogs are individuals, of course. Some Berners are naturally outgoing, some are more sensitive, some can be impetuous. Some will exhibit typical Berner characteristics to a greater degree than others. The Bernese Mountain Dog, if healthy, properly trained and made an integral part of his human family, will grow into a steady, loyal dog who, if healthy, will provide 10 to 12 years of incomparable companionship.

II. THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY BERNERS' PUPPY SEARCH SERVICE

The San Francisco Bay Berners was organized in 1974 by a group of Bernese Mountain Dog owners who wished to take a firm public stand against the breeding of dogs with hip dysplasia. It is one of the many regional clubs recognized by the Bernese Mountain Dog Club of America (BMDCA) but differs from many other dog clubs in that all members



Destined to leave their "Brown Swiss" cows...

agree to abide by a specific breeding "code." Currently, all SFBB members agree not to breed a dog with hip dysplasia or any of the developmental elbow diseases. Perhaps more importantly, they agree to make all health information on their dogs (and on all puppies they produce) available to an open database information file established by the SFBB to track health problems in the BMD.

In order to help prospective buyers locate breeders whose dogs are "phenotypically normal,"[1] the SFBB offers a Puppy Search Service. A list of the most recent dogs certifying normal by the GDC (Institute for Genetic Disease Control in Animals) or OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) is available.

Our Puppy Search Service is supported by membership dues and is offered at no charge, although donations are gratefully received. The only price we ask is a commitment to buy from a breeder who is evaluating all of the puppies they produce, and we hope, of course, that the buyer will want to further support the efforts of the SF Bay Berners to educate buyers and breeders by becoming a member.

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[1] Phenotype means the actual personal health characteristics of the individual dog. Genotype means the ability of the individual dog to transmit an inherited trait to its progeny (offspring); genotype is determined by a study of the phenotypes of the relatives of a given dog.

The first all-Berner training class, 1973, California

The SF Bay Berners share the views of Dr. George Padgett, a pathologist at Michigan State University School of Veterinary Medicine who has a special interest in the practical aspects of canine genetics. He states that breeding should be done with a double aim: to get dogs which phenotypically qualify for the AKC breed standard *and* which produce a high proportion of offspring which are genotypically normal.[2] To do this, a breeder must have the data on the relatives of the dogs that are being mated in order to know what the chances are of puppies in the resultant litter being affected with a trait, as well as knowing what the chances are that puppies will be carriers of a trait even if they do not show it themselves.

Dr. Padgett states that it is a Club's responsibility to supply certain information to its members and to:

1) Keep a list of genetic defects known to occur in the breed:
2) Keep a list of developing potential genetic defects;
3) Record known cases;
4) Record known carriers; and
5) Record potential carriers.

With helpful guidance from Dr. Padgett, the SF Bay Berners are attempting to do this with the organization of the BERNER-GARDE, a service using the BMD International Computer Data Registry. (See pg. 18)

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[2] A normal phenotype does not guarantee a desirable genotype.

Is the pup raised as a housedog?

III. SUBJECTS TO ADDRESS WHEN EVALUATING A BREEDING PROGRAM

A. TEMPERAMENT

Evaluating the temperament of a breeder's dogs will probably be the most difficult thing for a prospective puppy buyer to do. Having a beautiful dog is certainly desirable, but most people will primarily want a dog with a stable temperament who will make a fine companion and family pet. Ideally, the buyer should visit and see the dam and sire. A stable bitch will generally produce outgoing, confident puppies, whereas a nervous mother may convey a certain timidity to her offspring. If one can visit the dam, one can see how she reacts to strangers or to children. One can also see where she lives (kennel, house, etc.) and where the pups will spend their first eight weeks of life. This is also the chance to see how the breeder interacts with their dogs, and the breeder will have the opportunity to evaluate the prospective owner.

How did they spend their first 8 weeks of life?

Unfortunately, given the scarcity of Berner litters, it may be impossible to visit, and one may have to deal with breeders by telephone. How can one judge the temperament of dogs long-distance? Here are some suggestions:

1) Is the breeder's dog a housedog? If their breeding stock is kenneled, what do they do to provide the human-dog interaction that all Berners need? Do they show their own dogs?
2) Has the breeder trained any of their dogs for obedience work, tracking, carting, etc.? What about the parents of this particular litter? Do they have obedience or tracking titles? Aside from demonstrating a certain trainability, obedience and tracking titles are an indication of how much time a person spends one-on-one with their dog. (Obedience titles: C.D. for Companion Dog, C.D.X. for Companion Dog Excellent, U.D. for Utility Dog; T.D. and T.D.X. for Tracking Dog and Tracking Dog Excellent; and D.D. for Draft Dog.)
3) How does the breeder socialize their puppies? Are they raised in the house? If not, are they exposed to household noises, children, other animals? How thoroughly?

Exposed to other animals?

4) Does the breeder "temperament test" the puppies? Temperament testing, properly administered by a stranger to the pups when they are around six weeks of age, is designed to reveal critical behavioral tendencies of puppies subjected to "human attraction, leadership and physical and social dominance" (Campbell). The test may help decide which puppy is right for which home. One pup may not cope as readily as another pup with a household of active children, and some puppies could turn out to be a real handful for either a very soft owner or a very stern one.
5) The name of someone that you can visit who has a dog from a particular breeder can be obtained from the database.

B. SCREENING FOR HEALTH AND PHYSICAL PROBLEMS

All of the dog breeds are affected with some kinds of health problems. Since many of these problems are inheritable, the serious buyer will carefully examine any breeder's breeding program to see how they address these concerns. Perhaps the most important indicator of overall health would be longevity. A buyer could ask a breeder about the age of the parents and grandparents. How many aunts and

Careful when dealing with small creatures...

uncles (siblings of the breeding pair) are still alive? How many great aunts and great uncles? What was the cause and age of death for immediate relatives?

While a breeding pair may have sound *phenotypes* (no visible problems), there is no way to see their *genotype,* the kinds of genes they are able to pass on to their offspring.[3] That is why it is so important to look at the whole family's health in order to get an idea of what kinds of genes a puppy may have received.

In the BMD, there are specific health problems to address:

1) ***Hip dysplasia.*** Hip and elbow dysplasia are widespread degenerative diseases of the hip and elbow joints which occur in more than 100 breeds. They involve the improper fit of the joint socket. Because of the ill-fitting joints, secondary osteoarthritic changes occur, and the disease becomes progressively more severe as the animal ages. Although the dog may not show clinical lameness while it is young, lameness and pain, with difficulty in rising and in running, generally develop as the animal matures.

   If severe, the disease may produce symptoms as early as 3 months of age, and in all but a small percentage of the cases, hip dysplasia occurs by one year of age.

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[3] Phenotype means the actual personal health characteristics of the individual dog. Genotype means the ability of the individual dog to transmit an inherited trait to its progeny (offspring); genotype is determined by a study of the phenotypes of the relatives of a given dog. A normal phenotype does not guarantee a desirable genotype.

70% of the BMDs used for breeding in the U.S. since the 1960's have been certified as having normal hip conformation by x-ray by either the OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) or GDC (Institute for Genetic Disease Control in Animals). Informed breeders are now also having the elbows of their dogs evaluated. Buyers should verify that a breeding pair has a specific number issued by either agency. How many of the grandparents, aunts and uncles also certified normal?

A dam or sire with any degree of dysplasia is a known carrier of more of the dysplasia genes. Although such a dog may throw some puppies which grow to have normal hips, as well as dysplastic offspring, the risk of dysplasia is mathematically higher than in a mating of two dogs whose joints have been shown by radiograph to be normal.

Unfortunately it is not yet possible to map the package of genes for hip or elbow conformation that a *non-dysplastic* dog may be transmitting to its offspring. This is why no breeder can give a 100% guarantee that a puppy (even born of normal parents) will not develop hip or elbow dysplasia. However, it has been shown that breeding good hips and elbows to good hips and elbows statistically reduces the incidence of dysplasia. In a study done on German Shepherd Dogs at the Armed Forces Dog Training Center in Sweden, a 50% frequency of hip dysplasia in 1970 was reduced to 28% in 1975 when breeding was restricted to dogs and bitches with normal hips, along with the use of progeny records. This drastic reduction was effected in only five years (Hedhammar and Olssen. See bibliography for references.)

The only way to determine if a dog has normal hips is by having a radiograph (x-ray) taken when the dog is at least 12 months old. There are national registries which handle the reading and grading of x-rays, assigning a number to each dog whose x-rays show normal hips. All owners (including breeders) can now use the GDC if they want to share these evaluations with others to determine what risk their individual dog will have for passing on a trait to its offspring. This allows selection of a good phenotype and, in addition, an evaluation of what kind of a genotype it is carrying. The GDC requires a minimum of 12 months of age to certify normals, the same as most countries in the world. The GDC will register the abnormal evaluations at any age they are diagnosed. As an incentive, the GDC does not charge to evaluate and register the abnormal joints. Those who prefer to have their affected dogs remain confidential will continue to use the OFA for their evaluations. These evaluations can only be used for normal phenotype selection of an individual dog that may in fact carry a poor genotype. The OFA requires a

minimum of 24 months to certify normal hips or elbows. Only the GDC will release abnormals upon written request for use in genotype selection. The prospective buyer of any large breed of dog should insist that the dam and sire of their pup have been evaluated by the GDC or OFA.

In 1985 the OFA began issuing an "E," "G," or "F" letter, indicating the normal hip variations "Excellent," "Good," or "Fair." Be advised that very few Bernese Mountain Dogs obtain an "excellent" rating—less than 3% according to recent, very limited data from OFA.

If a dog does not receive a normal certification after x-rays have been submitted, it is because the joints were evaluated as dysplastic to some degree. An indeterminant "Borderline" rating occurs in only 0.8% of the cases according to OFA, and the owner of such a dog is requested to submit another x-ray taken six months later to note further disease.

In a letter to breed club representatives dated May 25, 1984, Dr. E.A. Corley, project director of the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals, cautioned us about putting too much importance on the new letter ratings, "This change has received a great deal of support from the fancy.[4] However, a word of caution is in order. A dog or bitch with a fair rating should not be indiscriminately eliminated from breeding. More information (pedigree depth, progeny records, etc.) is needed. For example, a 'fair' dog whose littermates, parents, grandparents, etc. are normal is a better prospect for producing normal hips than an 'excellent' dog with *less than 75% of its littermates being normal or with one or both parents being dysplastic, or dysplastic grandparents,* etc..." "On the other hand, if you are evaluating two dogs and your findings indicate that all qualities are essentially equal, but one had 'fair' hips and the other 'excellent' or 'good', then the choice is the dog with the better rating. Implied in the spectrum of hip phenotypes is the recommendation that a dog with a 'fair' rating be bred to a suitable mate with an 'excellent' or 'good' rating."

In 1990 the GDC was set up for the express purpose of recording the evaluations of diseases (both skeletal and soft tissue) in an open registry so that data can be used in the manner Dr. Corley described to predict the genotype of a dog.

2) ***Elbow dysplasia*** includes Fragmented Coronoid Process (FCP), Osteochondritis Dessicans (OCD), Ununited Anconeal Process (UAP), and Joint Incongruity. All of these are caused by the body's reaction to a joint which does not fit properly. The coronoid fracturing occurs during

[4] Dog fanciers, those concerned with purebred dogs.

Longevity...how many years of incomparable companionship?

the fastest growth period, most commonly between 4–6 months of age. If the anconeal process has had pressure on it during the time in which it normally unites with the ulna, it may remain as an ununited piece of bone. With these young cases, OCD will be observed in the area of the lesion. By one year old, arthrosis will become visible by x-ray in the elbows with any of these four elbow conditions. The degree of arthrosis will increase as time goes on. FCP, UAP, OCD, and Joint Incongruity all appear to have a genetic basis (See Wind). Buyers should check to see that the breeding pair and other close relatives have elbows certified normal by either the OFA or GDC.

3) The three most common ***cancers*** in the BMD are malignant histiocytosis, malignant lymphoma, and mast cell sarcoma. According to preliminary reports of a tumor study that is underway at the time of this publication, there is apparently a 10% risk of a Berner's having cancer; the resulting deaths peak at ages 5–8 years. (This study is being funded jointly by the BMD Club of America and the Morris Animal Foundation.)
4) ***Epilepsy*** does not occur frequently in the BMD. Onset is at approximately age two. Epilepsy appears as either motor seizures

(convulsions) or as psychomotor seizures producing hallucinations (imaginary flysnapping syndrome). Epilepsy can be "acquired" (due to head trauma or bacterial infections of the brain and central nervous system), or it can be "inherited." Many affected dogs respond well to drug therapy to control the seizures; drug treatment must usually be continued for the duration of the dog's life.

5) ***Progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)*** is an inherited, untreatable retinal disease causing blindness. It is uncommon in the BMD; to date three cases of PRA are publicly known. CERF, the Canine Eye Registration Foundation, has records of cataracts and of other PRA cases but does not release the identity of affected dogs. PRA dogs first lose their night vision, then gradually lose their day vision until they are totally blind. PRA affects those dogs who receive a pair of recessive genes, one from each parent; a dog who receives only one recessive gene will not develop PRA but will be a carrier and will pass on the affliction to some of its puppies if it is bred to a dog who also carries the recessive gene. In any case, it will pass on the carrier gene to a percentage of its puppies. PRA is one example of the great need for thorough progeny testing, particularly since the condition is not yet widespread in the Bernese Mountain Dog. The existence of just one offspring with PRA indicates that both parents are carriers who should not be bred again, and all non-affected siblings should be suspected of being potential carriers.

6) ***Allergies.*** Severe skin allergies have been reported in several BMDs. There is not enough information to indicate a genetic mode of inheritance, although in three serious cases dogs were full siblings.

Copies of published papers on these problems are available from San Francisco Bay Berners.

C. PEDIGREES

If the buyer contacts a breeder some weeks before the pups are ready to go, there is time to request and receive a copy of a prospective puppy's pedigree and perhaps a photograph as well. Examining a pedigree can be useful if one knows the dogs listed on it. However, the average puppy buyer will find that a pedigree gives him no indication whatsoever of how the puppies in this litter will turn out.

The buyer should know three things about pedigrees:

1) The abbreviation "Ch." before a dog's name means that the dog is a breed champion, that the dog was judged by several different judges to be the best specimen present at several shows. The title "Champion" is *not a guarantee* that the dog is physically sound. Although gait (movement) is one of the criteria used by judges, some dysplastic dogs move quite well.

As far as genetic hip soundness goes, it is more important to see normal certification (of the dam and sire, and of their close relatives) than a whole series of "Champions" throughout the pedigree. The most important factor for hip heredity is the percentage of normal hips in each *entire* litter which produced the dam and sire (their siblings), and this information is not available from a pedigree.

2) A pedigree will tell you what the degree of inbreeding (linebreeding) is in this particular mating. "Outcrossing" is the breeding of two unrelated dogs who have no ancestors in common; "inbreeding" means that the dam and sire are related to some degree. Some breeders distinguish between "inbreeding" and "linebreeding" with inbreeding indicating a very close relationship (e.g., niece to uncle) and linebreeding indicating a more distant relationship (e.g., the sharing of one grandparent).

   Inbreeding (or linebreeding) is done to maximize the chances of certain desirable characteristics being passed on to the puppies. Doubling up on desirable genes mathematically increases the chances of transmitting the desired trait. Unfortunately, doubling up of undesirable recessive genes can also occur more frequently in this kind of mating; and the closer the degree of inbreeding, the higher the mathematical probability. There is additional danger of fertility problems and unknown weakness factors in very close breedings. If a pedigree shows a close degree of inbreeding, the breeder can explain why they decided on this mating (what they hoped to see transmitted to the puppies) and whether they have done or will do progeny testing.

   Outcrossing can prevent the doubling up of undesirable recessive genes, but its great drawback is that there is no guarantee that desirable traits will be passed on with any consistency in the offspring. It is also highly likely that outcrossing will introduce another undesirable recessive gene(s) that may be hidden.

   Under all mating plans, dominant gene traits will continue to be passed on as traits in your dog. Recessive genes need a pair to become part of your dog's traits, but may exist in the "carrier only" state to be passed through each mating until a "pair gene" appears in a mate. Passing on undesirable recessives is how breeds often get into trouble without breeders and buyers being conscious of what is happening.

3) One of the things a pedigree cannot tell you about is longevity: which dogs are still living, and what was the age of death of the others. Longevity is the key indicator of overall health.

D. GUARANTEES

We strongly recommend a written contract between buyer and breeder which specifies what the breeder will do if the pup does turn out to be dysplastic or, in the case of a pup purchased as a "show prospect," develops other serious faults such as bad bite, skeletal defects, eye problems or other physiological problems. A written contract should guarantee that a breeder has confidence in the soundness of their breeding stock. It can also be the breeder's guarantee of buyer cooperation for progeny testing and neutering.

Although the majority of puppy buyers will not need to activate a guarantee, one should be sure that *all* portions of the contract are acceptable. Written contracts should state the buyer's responsibilities before activating a guarantee. Some breeders promise to replace the puppy at no charge to the buyer. If this is the case, it is important to know how often the breeder has litters available, and the buyer should consider whether it would be acceptable to bring a second dog into the family or whether a refund would be more acceptable. The buyer should also decide if they will comply with a requirement to neuter the dog for which a refund or replacement pup will be forthcoming. Does the breeder want a defective puppy returned and, if so, who pays for the shipping? There is usually no provision for refund if a "pet quality" pup (sold for a discounted price) develops dysplasia or other hereditary faults, although some breeders have replaced a pup which had to be euthanized because of crippling hip dysplasia.

A few breeders are becoming seriously involved in "progeny testing" and will want to follow up on *every* puppy they produce. The contract, in this case, could stipulate that the buyer agrees to radiograph and provide the breeder with copies or reports of hip or elbow x-rays taken at the appropriate ages or provide reports on health, etc., as the dog matures. If this is stipulated in the written contract, the buyer should be sure before taking one of these puppies that they are as committed as the breeder; progeny testing is most valid if there is total litter evaluation. (See below.)

E. PROGENY TESTING

Total progeny testing means that a breeder keeps records of *every* puppy that is produced in a litter. With the cooperation of the dogs' owners, the pups are evaluated during development to maturity which occurs at 24–36 months of age, depending on size. Although the priority will vary with each breeder, the evaluations, generally include temperament, health (including hip and elbow status, as well as other ailments which would limit movement, require surgery, or affect sight or longevity), and factors which alter the appearance of the breed according to the AKC (American Kennel Club) standard.

There are three major reasons for doing progeny testing:

1) There is no way breeders can be sure of the quality (phenotype) of the dogs they are producing unless they receive the evaluations of these dogs.
2) A *total* litter evaluation will give breeders an indication of the *frequency of occurrence* of good or bad qualities in the dogs they produce. This is currently the only way to unmask *genotype* of breeding stock, the types of genetic combinations a dog can pass on to his or her offspring (progeny). For example, a dog with normal hips may carry a partial gene package for hip dysplasia. If it is shown through progeny testing that such a dog consistently produces a higher than average percentage of dysplastic pups, this dog can be removed from the breeding program.
3) The sharing of progeny information is the only way to know how often a defect is occuring in the breed. It will give breeders a way to choose the best genetic material possible when planning a breeding. Informed breeding will reduce the frequency of genetically transmitted problems, and perhaps it will eventually be possible to eliminate many of these problems from the breed as a whole. Progeny testing will also give the buyer more information with which to make decisions.

F. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

It has been demonstrated that the most important period in puppy socialization, when its permanent bonding with its master takes place, is between seven and twelve weeks of age. This is the most essential time the new owner will spend with their new puppy. (See bibliography for suggested reading.)

Because of the importance of the bonding period, we generally do not recommend getting a puppy who is older than nine weeks when it joins its new family (See Scott and Fuller). Sometimes, however, older puppies are available, and they can adapt successfully to a new home depending on their basic temperament and on how well they were socialized to people and strange environments during the early bonding stage. We do suggest that an older pup be examined by someone thoroughly familiar with normal Berner development to ascertain whether or not the pup should make a smooth transition to a new family. A puppy who has been inadequately socialized may seem bouncy and happy in the environment to which it is accustomed (its kennel, for instance) but may never be able to adapt completely to the comings and goings and surprises of a normal family.

Very occasionally the SF Bay Berner Rescue/Placement Service may hear that an adult dog is available for adoption for one reason or another. Many of these dogs have been thoroughly socialized—going to dog shows, traveling,

being around rowdy kids—and can make wonderful pets. If a Berner has been abandoned and is discovered at a shelter, the Rescue/Placement Chairman will place the dog temporarily with a foster family while the dog's temperament, hips, and elbows are evaluated before placing it permanently. These dogs may require more time and patience and gentle handling. Please advise the Chairman if you might consider an adult dog.

IV. THE BERNER-GARDE

The Berner-Garde is a foundation set up to oversee the acquisition and dissemination of information related to genetic traits in the BMD. The Berner-Garde Foundation was established with the belief that breeders can reduce genetic disease while breeding for good temperament and type. To support this, the Foundation is dedicated to educating and sharing accurate information about genetic disease, using the data collected in the BMD International Computer Data File, initiated by the San Francisco Bay Berners in 1984.

This database, which uses a Data Base IV computer program, includes approximately 10,000 dogs at this date. The program can print out multi-generational pedigrees as well as all information that has been submitted about a dog's ancestors—such as conformation and obedience titles, physical traits (blue eye, abnormal markings), and health status. Several BMD Regional Groups now have a copy of the Data File program and are adding their regional group data. We also communicate with BMD groups in Switzerland, Great Britain, Sweden, and Canada.

The SF Bay Berners encourage all owners to submit data on their dogs for entry into the computer program. Their dog will be assigned a permanent number, and the file can be updated easily (change of address, GDC or OFA evaluation, titles, medical problems, etc.). Computer data entry forms are enclosed with each SFBB Information Packet, and extra copies can be requested from the SFBB Records Chairman. Access to information in the database is available to all owners and clubs of Bernese Mountain Dogs internationally, to approved researchers, and to other appropriate users.

The objective of a genetic disease control program is to reduce the incidence of inherited disease in a kennel and in the breed as a whole. Effective control of genetic disease requires that affected as well as unaffected individuals in litters of dogs be identified and recorded in a professional disease registry. The progress of a genetic disease control program can be measured by maintaining an accurate

database of prevalence within the breed. Reporting this kind of data can help to measure the progress of the breed as a whole. Improvements in the breed can be made more rapidly when the average for the breed is known.

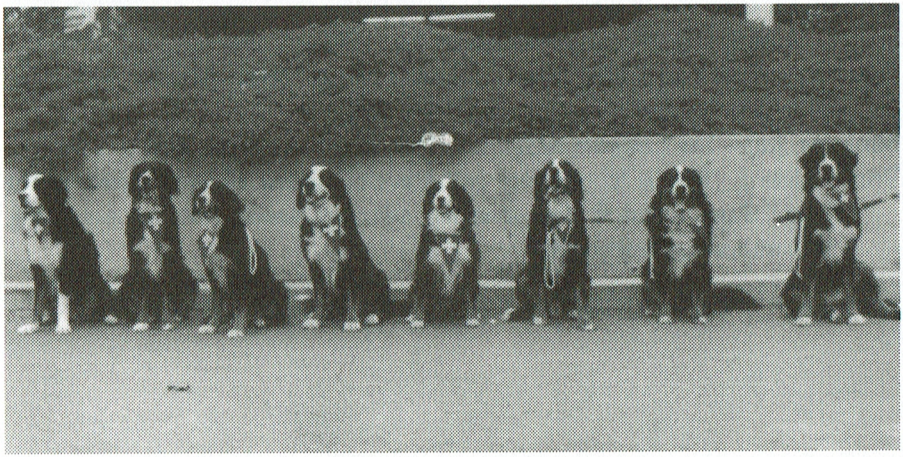
Few persons can do it alone. Most breeders have small kennels and cannot afford or do not care to have a large breeding colony. Only by working with other breeders and sharing information in an open database like the Berner-Garde can any long term control of genetic disease on a breed-wide basis be achieved.

V. THE PROSPECTIVE BUYER CAN HELP

If the breeder of a puppy requests follow-up information, conscientious owners provide it. They spay or neuter a dog if that was promised, provide copies of x-ray results, keep the breeder informed of health status as the dog ages, and advise the breeder when the dog dies. (Just as with humans, longevity of the dog appears to be affected primarily by genetic make-up.) A thoughtful owner also sends a copy of any necropsy results since such information can be of tremendous value to the breeder and, by extension, to the breed.

The San Francisco Bay Berners feel that informed buyers, and breeders who appreciate these buyers, are the best possible guarantee for the future of this breed. By seeking sound breeding stock and by being willing to participate fully in a breeder's program of progeny testing, you can make an invaluable contribution.

Welcome to our ranks!



1983 Square Dancers

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